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## Thomas Coryate and His Passage to India

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Discovery has always inspired man and travel has been one of the oldest mediums to know the unknown. Travel in the earlier days comprised of visiting new lands in order to enlighten oneself about things alien and foreign. However around the 17<sup>th</sup> century travel in Britain was considered a form of education. Travel gained recognition and people began to travel in order to study and in turn educate the masses at home regarding newer lands, people and cultures. This wave gained momentum over the next few years and matured into the Grand Tour.

This paper deals with Thomas Coryate, the famous yet infamous traveler and his travels to the east. Coryate's second journey began in the year 1612 from Dover with its final destination as Mogul India.

### CORYATE AND HIS EASTWARD TRAVEL

On his eastward peregrination he moved across the significant empires of Ottoman, Persian and Mogul. Coryate is said to have written various letters about his experiences which he entrusted to other English travelers on their way home to England to be handed over to various friends. Unfortunately these never reached their destination. However, letters written regarding the Holy Land, did reach the hands of the well known Samuel Purchas but were not given due credit. Purchas who was in charge of compiling various pilgrimages and journeys too was a frequenter of the Court of Prince Henry. Hence there is a very great possibility of him knowing Thomas Coryate if not personally at least through his prior publication the *Crudities*.

It is unfortunate that Coryate was not duly given his worth. After reading the *Crudities* one can imagine the kind of observations he may have recorded. While reading his vivid and intense accounts that portray the foreign lands, it is as though the reader is actually moving with him through space and time.

It was from Ajmer in India that he wrote certain letters which members of the East India

Company carried home for him safely and published in 1616. These letters written from the Mogul's Court would form the basis of this paper. Through these letters one can see the manner in which Thomas Coryate depicts the "Orient", and whether his writings reveal the mental colonization of the East.

Coryate used travel as a medium to fame. After he had been lauded enough for his journey around continental Europe and his *Crudities*, Coryate decided to undertake another major step in direction of his self publicity. This time he decided to go all the way to India to see the Great Mogul in all his glory, and ride upon an elephant.<sup>1)</sup>

Prior to his departure, he went home to Odcombe where he delivered an elegant oration and hung up his shoes in which he had traversed continental Europe, in the Odcombe church.<sup>2)</sup> The aspect of his travelling around continental Europe in a single pair of shoes has been included in the panegyric verse by Henry Peacham who writes, "To the famous Traveller ever to be esteemed the joy of his Somersetshire, Thomas Coryate of Odcombe, professed enemy to the Gentle-craft or Mysterie of Shoo-makers."<sup>3)</sup>

William Foster also suggests that "An ingenious commentator has found an allusion to this in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, where 'brave Master Shoetie, the great traveller', is named among the inmates of the Duke's prison" could possibly be hinting to Coryate. However he further adds that since the play was produced in 1604 (but not printed until 1623), some person who was inspired by Coryate's feat may have included it at a later stage.<sup>4)</sup>

Thomas Coryate on 20 October, 1612 (though Samuel Purchas specifies the date he does not specify whether it was the date when Coryate left home, embarked the ship or the ship sailed) with letters of introduction to the English ambassador in Constantinople set sail on his eastward mission with the assistance of Lionel Cranfield who is said to have been Coryate's friend, admirer and banker and Richard Martin who had introduced him to Henry Wotton in Venice. Both these persons also played authoritative roles in the Levant Company hence their support played a vital role in assisting Coryate.

The ship on which Coryate set sail probably was owned by the Levant Company. M. Epstein suggests in *History of the Levant Company* that such ships were said to weigh around 200 to 350 tons with a capacity to accommodate thirty to seventy persons, and that they flew the Royal Arms of England and were heavily armed.<sup>5)</sup>

Strachan informs that probably Coryate was not aware of the fact that he was travelling at the most dangerous time. Strachan who cites George Sandys reports that it was from May to October that the Turkish navy was at sea "to annoy the enemy, suppress Pirats, collect tribute and reforme disorders in the Maritime townes". Thus, we can understand that Coryate was not well acquainted with important details of the journey. All he was interested as we know was that he wanted to go

on a journey which would earn him further publicity. Here we can see fit the proverb "Ignorance is Bliss" perfectly to the state of Coryate.

He could have probably re-scheduled his journey had he known that the timing was not a good one. However, from the character of Coryate one can deduce that he enjoyed danger. On his return from the continental feat he published the *Crudities* and he along with his work was enjoying the limelight. Nevertheless limelight is short lived and Coryate who had a burning desire to bathe in the spotlight may have decided to go on another expedition as soon as possible to reset his position this time in a stronger way. Hence dangerous conditions in turn may have compelled him to set sail even though the timing was not a feasible one.

As Coryate moves from the familiar into the unfamiliar he draws a comparison between the chapels in Zante with those he was accustomed to seeing at home. He asserts that there are forty three chapels in all "only they are so little that a faire Towne Church of England will make neere half a score of them".<sup>6)</sup> Here Coryate depicts the people of Zante as an ignorant lot who are not only unaware of their glorious past but rather uninterested in it.

The next halt which Coryate makes is on the island of Chios which was then under Turkish rule. On his arrival here he was introduced to resident English merchants who ushered him to the monastery of Neo Mona. Here once again Coryate with his typical usage of superlatives describes "the goodliest waxe candle that ever I saw in my life, some eight foote high fastened to a wall, and so bigge as my middle for I measured it with my girdle". Provided any small opportunity Coryate was always ready to flaunt his language skills. Here too he tried speaking to the monks in Greek, but was disillusioned: "for I could not finde as much as one learned man of the whole two hundred ...they could only read their Manuscript Greeke Bookes, but neither understand or speake any learned Greeke but the moderne". Once more Coryate with his already acquired sound education sets himself as a representative of the learned English distinctly apart from these monks.<sup>7)</sup>

Thus one can see that as Coryate steps from the known into the unknown he paints a canvas with colors which he is familiar with. The paint which is nothing but his sound education in humanities which he acquired at Oxford bestowed him with a strong command of the classics. It is through this already amassed scholarship that Coryate uses analytical, critical or speculative methods to portray these areas and its simple people.

It was around the middle of February that Coryate set sail for Constantinople. On 22 February the group of fourteen other Englishmen, Coryate and an interpreter dropped anchor and alighted to tour what the members probably imagined to be the ruins of Homer's Troy. Strachan asserts that "Coryate's account was so accurate that it can be concluded that they were among the ruins of Alexandria Troas". It is a matter of bewilderment why Coryate assumed these ruins to be that of Troy.

Former accounts of ancient geographers, notably works like that of Strabo and Pierre Belon whom Coryate was well versed with, assert these ruins as that of Troy, probably resulting him to believe thus. The local guides as Lithgow mentions were prepared with answers as they were already accustomed with what was going to be asked and would "without hesitation point out the tombs as belonging to Hector, Ajax, Achilles, Troilus, Hecuba and other worthies." This fact may have propelled Coryate right into the ancient times with him watching historical events like a silent movie.

Earlier Englishmen like John Sanderson, Thomas Dallam, William Lithgow, George Sandys and Fynes Moryson too visited these areas but none of their accounts match the accuracy and vivid description of Coryate.<sup>8)</sup> Purchas notes that the reader should pardon him for he has edited certain material on which he says "I would at once present Troy acted by a Trojan spirit, which may both profit the studious antiquarie, and serve to resolve and thaw the most frozen spirit of severe gravity or stupidest stoike: melting some delights if not extorting laughter from him". In such manner one can decipher to what extent the works of Coryate have been edited by Purchas. One must admit thus that Coryate who was extremely sensitive about details has been slashed by the tool of editing. Every written account whether it provokes laughter or not plays a vital role in the understanding of not only the place, person or fact it is describing but also of the writer himself.

Without regard to the fact that Coryate and his companions were "all armed to the teeth against possible assault by the inhabitants" from the time they set afoot Alexandria Troas, they were treated without hostility. The inhabitants scrutinized them with curiosity and made it clear that they were offering their services as guides for remuneration. Coryate forgetting all about his weapons instead picked up his writing materials and instruments.

At a short distance from where Coryate had landed he sights four of five marble pillars. He instantly measures them and assigns a numerical value. This practice of attesting a numerical value as though naming something numerically is a means by which he transforms the unknown into the known. Coryate adopts this method through all his travels whether they were around continental Europe or the East. It also is a proof that he has actually visited these places and has witnessed these historical facts for himself. Coryate at all times is extremely conscious of his readership at home. He probably uses these precise figures to assert the intelligence and forwardness of his education.

Another reason for Coryate to go into the minute details is to assert that what he values as knowledge is empirically correct. The correctness allows him as a matter of fact to set a value for all the knowledge he has amassed until then. His knowledge allows him to tour the past as he imagines and applies his knowledge to what he is witnessing now. At no point does he get lost in

asserting certain facts. For instance the pillars of marble which he measures he immediately connects with what he has read in the account of Petrus Bellonius. <sup>9)</sup> Coryate was unable to read the inscriptions written on the pillars, but he does not hesitate in adding that "I hope no man will taxe me of a rash opinion if I believe one of them might be the Monument of King Ilus, the enlarger of the Citie of Troy; for I remember that Homer saith in his eleventh Iliad, that Ilus was buried in the open, as this was. <sup>10)</sup>

Similarly regarding the other pillar he asserts "that another of them might be the Monument of King Priamus, it is not altogether unlikely, for Virgil writeth in his second Aeneid that King Priamus, after the late fatall destruction of the Citie was slain by Pyrrhus the Sonne of Achilles, neere the Trojan shoare..." <sup>11)</sup>

Once again we notice that Coryate asserts facts for which he gives a valid explanation. This explanation probably arises from the premise that Coryate is just trying to confirm the education he attained by applying it and numerically quantifying his observations. Another aspect which needs to be clarified is that Coryate is not comparing his observations with the accounts of his predecessors but with his own knowledge. He does at times confirm what he has read in the past with what he sees, but hardly does he ever refer to the works of earlier travels to describe the so called "other". He in his distinct style analyses every situation, monument or fact and blends it with his learning to paint the situation as his eyes have captured or his mind has experienced.

Memory was one of the strongest gifts Coryate was endowed with. Whatever he saw in these historical ruins he compared with his knowledge out of memory. He had not carried with him any books for reference. His memorization of all the classics allowed him to quote whichever necessary apt passages and verses from the classics.

After Coryate and his companion Master Robert Rugge had gratified their eyes with the wondrous ruins, Rugge was highly impressed with the interest and painstaking manner with which Coryate searched the ruins which he refers to as "the most notable". As a remuneration "in merrie humour [Rugge] drew his Sword out of his Scabberd, and ascending to one of these great stones that lye in the open part of this middle Gate Knighted mee, pronounced those wittie verses *ex tempore*:"

Coryate no more, but now a Knight of Troy,  
 Odcombe no more, but henceforth England's Joy.  
 Brave Brute of our best English wits commended;  
 True Trojane from Aeneas race descended.  
 Rise top of wit, the honour of our Nation,  
 And to old Ilium make a new Oration. <sup>12)</sup>

Thus, Coryate who is knighted is highly honoured immediately makes a counter oration.

Loe heere with prostrate knee I doe embrace  
 The gallant title of a Trojan Knight.  
 In Priams Court which time shall ne're deface;  
 A grace unknowne to any Brittitish Wight.  
 This noble Knighthood shall Fame's Trumpe resound,  
 To Odcombes honour maugre Envie fell,  
 O're famous Albion throughout that lland round  
 Till that my mournfull friends shall ring my knell.<sup>13)</sup>

Once again Coryate through this knighting ceremony creates a link between the ancient and glorious past and himself which is also a representation of present day England. He once again makes himself a part of this past. After his speech he reminds the onlookers of the other famous personalities like Alexander the Great and Emperors Hadrian and Septimus Severus. Towards the end of his speech he attains a very moralistic attitude and takes "a sharp dig at fast living in London Towne" and explains the "moral rottenness of its inhabitants" as the prime cause for the fall of Troy. Coryate thus reconfirms his witty and pious stances.<sup>14)</sup>

On their way back Coryate and his companions sight a man ploughing his field. Excited, Coryate and Francis Flyer take turns to work with the plough and remark "if wee live to be Old men we may say in our old age, we had once holden the plough in the Trojane Territorie". As revealed here Coryate shows interest in simple activities which would not have been the case had he travelled with a biased attitude towards the east. He finds pleasure in constructing a position for himself in the classical past through his thorough knowledge. Coryate's act of tilling the land leaves an impression not only on the land but on his own image as a participant in the classical past. Highly satisfied with his encounters he says that "he would have willingly foregone five hundred pounds to make it, a sum which is probably greater than he ever possessed".

Finally Coryate collects certain pieces of debris, among which is a white marble head. A mention of this has been made in one of his letters from India where he asks to be remembered to the famous antiquary Sir Robert Cotton who he presumes would be highly impressed with this information. Thus, Coryate hopes to carry such pieces home not only as a proof of his visit to this place, but also a souvenir to be valued like a Holy Relic.<sup>15)</sup>

Before departing Troy his advice to his countrymen is that they should travel to famous areas and make observations, especially Troy which he refers to as the most worthy ruin. The fact that

Troy was a ruin seems to be a blessing for Coryate. The ruined state allowed Coryate to sketch events and monuments in a manner which he hoped. This gave him the freedom to carve his own memories and apply his knowledge in a manner he hoped. Had this area been in a perfect state Coryate would have been at war with his conscience of which his humanistic education formed a vital part.<sup>16)</sup>

Purchas who heavily edited Coryate's account wrote: "But me thinkes I heare some Trojan complaine of another tedious ten-yeers Seige: I will therefore abruptly breake off the rest". This reveals a very crucial aspect wherein Purchas openly admits that he edits whatever he thinks is not necessary. As a result of this slashing of the "rest" one cannot read of Coryate's journey out of Troy until the time he reaches Constantinople.<sup>17)</sup>

Strachan mentions that it was somewhere around the end of March 1613 that Coryate arrived in Constantinople. On his arrival he right away makes an oration before Mr. Paul Pindar the ambassador. Paul Pindar in a letter dated 14 April 1613, to the ambassador of Venice; Sir Dudley Carleton mentions the arrival of Thomas Coryate accosting him as "Heare is with me that famous travailer of Odcombe Sir Thomas Coryate". The letter also states that Coryate had been knighted under the name of King Priam while travelling through Troy. The letter also states Coryate's onward plans. The next destinations on his itinerary after Constantinople are Jerusalem and Cairo, after which he plans to return to Venice. There is a certain element of doubt in this statement as Coryate at his point has no plans of visiting India. News of Coryate was thus spreading in the homeward direction at a time when persons at home were just beginning to forget him for his earlier peregrinations.

Coryate during his two years stay here should have surely made numerous notes. These notes as Strachan states he carried with him to Aleppo and sent them home around 1614. These notes have however been heavily edited and condensed by Purchas. The final output is just a mere fifty pages. Comparing these notes with the volume of *the Crudities*, one can approximately calculate the amount of information the readers are losing out on. Probably this information was cut off because of its volume and accuracy or because it was already included in the accounts of other travellers.

Coryate witnesses a "very rigorous and austere kind of Discipline" at a mass held in a Monastery of Franciscan Friars. A little after the midnight mass commenced, "certaine fellowes" who were galley slaves and had been hired by rich Christians as proxies were to suffer penance in their place. Coryate remarks this to be a "tragicall Spectacle" and Purchas in a marginal comment states "these hypocrites which doe Penance by others, must go to Heaven by proxie too". Not only Coryate but Purchas too demonstrates his courage, patriotism and piety.<sup>18)</sup>

Another incident which cannot be missed out is when the ambassador persuaded Paul Pindar



to meet a fortune teller. By making Coryate roll dice, Rama the fortune teller predicted that he "was a man desirous to Travell into remote Regions, that according to my desire I should travell farre, and should be in danger for my Religion sake, and should also escape that danger, after that I should come to a great Citie (perhaps he meant London) where many would flock about me to hear me Discourse of those things that I had seene and done in my Travels".

The above prediction as Strachan rightly points out is a "reasonably accurate summary of the past". As far as the future goes, Coryate dies four years later in India without any publication to his credit. This prediction may be considered accurate, but what could be another reason for the accuracy is the number of English travellers visiting the place with almost the similar itinerary as Coryate. Another point which surfaces here is the hostility the English Protestants faced in the Islamic countries, by the fact that they should face danger for the sake of their religion.<sup>19)</sup>

Besides site seeing and mastering Turkish Coryate was also taking lessons in Italian. At this point of time Italian was the "lingua franca" in which all Europeans communicated and conducted commerce in the Levant. As concerns cultural encounters Coryate witnessed the circumcision ceremony. As always Coryate not only makes a detailed report of the ceremony but compares it with his knowledge of the same gained from studying the Bible. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, Coryate had faced the danger of being circumcised when he was visiting the ghetto in Venice and had got into a heated argument with a Rabbi. Witnessing the present ceremony and comparing it with his knowledge and past experience allows him to upgrade himself in terms of scholarship.<sup>20)</sup>

On another occasion Coryate witnesses the Mohammedan version of the circumcision ceremony. Three boys were "circumcised with traditional festivity" and were made to parade the town astride palfreys. There were slaves, horse guards and flute players marching before the boys. All this to Coryate seemed "very ridiculous and squeaking".<sup>21)</sup> Here unlike the time when he witnessed the Jewish ceremony, he had no prior knowledge to compare the ceremony with and hence had no clue of what to expect. However we cannot just put Coryate's comment off as biased towards the Muslims. Coryate as we have seen is rather frank in such cases where he feels free to express his true opinion and hence he should not be misinterpreted as biased.

However there is no other mention of any ceremonies conducted by Muslims which he attended. This is probably because he was not well versed with their customs and practices as he may have never studied it prior to his arrival here. However another highly possible reason could be that Purchas may have edited his reports. From the character of Coryate one will not hesitate to believe that he had a very inquisitive mind and it was near impossible to believe that he does not mention the Muslim tradition. He does mention the Ramadan festival which began in October when all mosques were decorated with lights.

In Aleppo he witnessed people of different races like Turks, Greeks, Armenians, and Jews. Merchants from Venice, France, Britain and Netherlands also flocked here to take advantage of the trade connections. Here Coryate meets a fellow Somersetian, the Consul Bartholomew Haggett. Strachan reveals that Coryate had already timed his departure from Aleppo to be in time for Easter celebrations in Jerusalem.

Strachan reveals that Protestants “had the powerful incentive of curiosity to see with their own eyes the places where events had taken place which determined their whole mental and spiritual attitude to the past, the present and the eternal future”. Fynes Moryson also reveals a similar kind of reason where he admits that “when I had once begun to visite forraigne parts, I was so stirred up by emulation and curiosity...”<sup>22)</sup> Coryate according to Strachan may have planned his pilgrimage with the similar kind of emotions.<sup>23)</sup>

Thus Coryate as planned visits the Holy land where he buys certain mementos and very proudly shows them to Terry after his arrival in India. Coryate got his left arm tattooed with a picture of Christ and the right one with the words *Via, Veritas, Vita* besides which he bought four small crosses, one in each quarter of a larger cross. Thus, Coryate after taking full advantage of his visit to the Holy Land returns to Aleppo from where he sends his enormous account to Purchas.<sup>24)</sup>

In September 1611 Coryate enrolled himself with a caravan bound for Isfahan, the capital of Persia. Crossing the Tigris and Euphrates Coryate proceeded to Armenia. Coryate makes no mention of any physical discomfort like heat or cold.

He does however express shock at the barrenness of the land by quoting Virgil, “*infelix lolium et steriles dominantur avenae*” meaning “the luckless darnel and barren oats hold sway”.<sup>25)</sup> Hence, Coryate once again uses his knowledge of the classics to describe the barren land, which shows that he referred to the classics for an apt description. This also shows that his education and knowledge of the classics was live and flowing through his veins. He continues his journey providing details of meeting points of trade routes at Kazvin. The bazaars here comprised of goods like Persian silks and rugs, Indian jewels and spices, sables and martens out from Muscovy, red and purple cloth from Venice, English broadcloth and the like.<sup>26)</sup>

As he walked on he came across a caravan travelling in the opposite direction. This was almost at the border between India and Persia. This was the first time Coryate witnessed elephants who were heading the caravan. Coryate is said to have immediately made enquiries and to his surprise learnt that an Englishman and his wife were on their way to the Court of Shah Abbas. The Englishman was none other than the well known “Sir” Robert Sherley. Coryate’s joy knew no bounds when Sherley showed him a copy of *the Crudities*.

Coryate states that “Both he and his lady used me with singular respect”. He adds that they were “so gallantly furnished with all the necessaries for their travailes, that it was a great comfort

unto mee to see them in such a flourishing estate". These necessities Coryate directly related with the benevolence of the Mogul Emperor, Jehangir and probably may have raised hopes of him receiving similar kinds of gifts.

Thus, as he trudges along he meets a Muslim who is well versed in Italian who calls Coryate a *giaur* meaning infidel. Coryate as Strachan reveals had to face such insults regularly when he was a part of the Muslim space. This time since Coryate was in Mogul domain he decided to give back all he had borne. He was very proud of this oration he made, since he writes in detail about this incident to his mother.

However what needs to be kept in mind is the fact that these set of letters were published after Coryate's death. As pointed out above, it must have been heavily edited. It is also true that these letters were subject to a lot of editing at the hands of Samuel Purchas. Coryate's last work which is called, *Mr Thomas Coriat to his friends in England sendeth greeting: From the capital city of the Dominion of the Great Mogoll in the Eastern India, the last of October, 1616* was printed for John Taylor and John Beale. This series of letters unlike the earlier set depicts Coryate astride a camel. A black nude man is leading the way. Coryate just like his previous woodcut is clad in English clothes and carries a sword. Two men clad in robes are seen in the background and they seem to be responding to Coryate's greeting.

### CORYATE'S INDIA

After Coryate made his entry into the Mogul court he is successful in having a meeting with the Emperor Jahangir in whose favor he makes the following oration;

The cause of my coming hither [to India] is for foure respects. First, to see the blessed face of your Maiesty [the Great Mogul, Jehangir], whose wonderful fame hath resounded ouer all Europe & the Mahometan Countries...secondly to see your Maiesties Elephants, which kind of beasts I have not seen in any other country. Thirdly, to see your famous river Ganges, which is the caiptaine of all the Riuer in the World. The fourth is that you should vouchsafe to grant mee your gracious Passe that I may trauell into the Country of Tartaria to the City of Samarkand, to visit the blessed Sepurcher of the Lord of the Corners (this is a title that is given to Tamburlaine in this Country in that Persian language...) whose fame by reason of his warres and victories is published ouer the whole world: perhaps he is not altogether so famous in his own country of Tartaria as in England.<sup>27)</sup>

Coryate had already mastered Persian tongue before he entered India. As can be seen from

the contents of the above oration, Coryate lays down four reasons for making the long journey from England to India. Firstly he flatters the emperor by saying that he came all the way to have a glimpse of the majesty's blessed face whose name and fame has spread far and wide. As we know the real reason behind this oration was that, if favored by Jahangir, Coryate would pave for himself financial assistance in the form of a handsome purse.

As is known this oration managed well in elating the emperor who presented Coryate with a handsome purse of hundred pieces of silver equaling approximately ten pounds. This aid was a blessing for Coryate who had been robbed of almost all of his money while on his way to India. He had been looked after by Thomas Roe at the factory premises of the East India Company.

The second reason is what early modern English writers always connected with the image of India, elephants. In the earlier accounts one can notice that the elephants portray a binary image of power versus that of barbarianism. Finally towards the end of the oration Coryate reveals his desire to see the famous river Ganges and lastly his desire to receive permission from Jahangir to visit the tomb of Tamburlaine. However Jahangir promptly tells him that he has no power for the same.

This speech was made when Coryate was able to catch Jahangir's attention one day at the morning audience. In the letter which Coryate had addressed to his mother he clearly specifies the reason for his long stay in Agra, which was to have a good command over Persian which would enable him to make an oration in praise of the emperor someday.

Coryate began his oration with a very humble self introduction. In it he referred to himself as a poor English traveller. The oration followed, after which he is said to have exchanged a few words with the emperor. This oration had been organized very secretly. Coryate says that if Thomas Roe the ambassador would have known of this event, "He would have stopped and Barracadoed all my proceeding therein." However when Roe heard of this incident he was infuriated and he is said to have reprimanded Coryate with the following words:

It would redound some what to dishonour of our Nation, that one of our Countrey should present himselfe in that beggarly and poore fashion to the King out of an insinuating humor to crave mony of him<sup>28)</sup>

This incident however did not in the slightest break Coryate's back. After being robbed of almost all of his money he was in a dire state as he needed cash to return to England.

Edward Terry besides being chaplain to Sir Thomas Roe, the first official ambassador to India, was also a close acquaintance of Thomas Coryate. Terry maintained a detailed diary of his travels and activities in India. On retirement he compiled a book which earned him a place in *the*

*Dictionary of National Biography*. Terry justifies a number of times that Coryate was a passionate traveller, and had a command over many languages. Edward Terry was the person who was by Coryate's side at the time of his death.

Terry said that his command over *Indostani* was amazing. There was this one laundress at Roe's house who would brawl from dawn until dusk. One day Coryate shut her up by arguing back with her in absolute fluent *Indostani*. This was also, as one can see, a big accomplishment for Coryate. As this too in a certain way was an oration he had made, obviously in this case not in praise of the laundress, but in indirect praise of himself.

However in spite of having such fluency, Thomas Roe never employed him as translator for the East India Company. Dealings with the Mogul Court were difficult for the ambassador as language was a very large barrier. However Roe is said to have employed an Italian translator to deal with the Moguls. This again solidifies the argument that Coryate was in no way connected with political matters and hence not an asset to the East India Company.

Building new trade relations with India was the main inducement for Thomas Roe. However, Coryate was not considered the right person to act as mediator probably because he was not in any way inclined to business. This further goes on to prove that in spite of the dire circumstances the East India Company was in, they preferred an Italian to negotiate terms and not Coryate.

Another reason which we can construe here is the image Coryate portrayed at home. His buffoonish image may have to a certain extent played a role in deciding his participation in business activities conducted by the Company, or it could have just been that he may have refused to cooperate with the company on these issues. He was as we know very interested in his self appraisal, hence he may have not wanted to change his schedule and help the company as weighing the benefits, it would have been more lucrative for him to help the company and earn a wage, as he was in dire state of money to go on his new ventures. However as we can see that he has in no way assisted the company, but has kept his passion for travelling in first place. Also we cannot ignore the fact that Thomas Roe was very upset at Coryate for requesting the Mogul Emperor for monetary assistance. Roe is said to have taken Coryate to task for doing the same. Hence it may also be true that Thomas Roe may have considered Coryate as nuisance rather than any benefit to the Company.

Roe who always expected to be treated as an equal was rather perturbed that an Englishman could stoop to such a low level to obtain money. Coryate on the other hand was desperately in need of the money but surely priced the meeting and oration much more than the materialistic favor endowed upon him.

Coryate as we know was very fond of performances, whether it was in the form of an oration before the Mogul Emperor or making an oration in praise of Thomas Roe or was bickering with

the local laundress at the East India Company's factory in Surat. He was quick at constructing a stage, anywhere for himself where he was always ready to perform. In other words, one can notice from his style of writing that he always sets his accounts in a drama setup. The flow of the story as one can see is very natural, which is possible only when one decides to pen down what he has exactly seen without any alterations or amendments. As Coryate has mentioned a couple of times that he is a private man with no interest whatsoever in politics, we can then conclude that in the case of India as well as of other places he has not written with any such motive as colonizing or controlling.

Coryate's dramatization of events is rather unique; he uses fabled personalities such as Ulysses, Aeneas and Tamburlaine. This as Jyotsna Singh points interrogates the authenticity of Coryate's accounts of the Mogul emperor Jehangir.

During his entire stay in India Coryate was obsessed with learning various languages. Edward Terry with whom Coryate shared a room was one of his closest friends. Coryate always was in the habit of using superlatives in just describing that he was impressed by any and every thing.

Coryate during his stay in Agra is said to have mixed freely with the inhabitants.<sup>29)</sup> Coryate wore local clothes which further bridged the gap between him and the locals.

The compilation of the letters he wrote home has been bound into *Thomas Coryate Traueller for the English Wits*. (London: W. Iggard and Henry Fetherston, 1616) whose cover has an engraving of Thomas Coryate astride an elephant. This picture of him is the first stereotype image of the east that his works depict. The elephant was a well-known beast in England at the time; however, their image was connected with the exotic east that housed rare creatures. Here it can also be noted that the King of Portugal presented the Pope with an elephant in the year 1514. From this it can be inferred that the elephant was a gift which symbolized power. Edmund Spenser through his poetry poses an image of the elephant that is not very positive, as he connects it with "wilde and salvage man."<sup>30)</sup> The physical size of the elephant as expressed by Thomas Coryate as huge (thirteen and a half feet tall) not only creates a binary image of exotic versus powerful, but at the same time adds to the set image of the barbarous. Further he writes in a poem below his picture astride an elephant:

Loe here the wooden Image of our wits;  
Borne, in first traiaile, on the backs of Nits;  
But now on Elephants, & c:  
O, what will he ride, when his years expire?  
The world must ride him; or he all will tire.

This account as we know was published after his death. Had Coryate been alive he may have not portrayed himself the manner in which it has been done. Coryate astride the elephant and in control is the depiction that has been rendered to him, and is what was in accordance with the prevalent trend at the time. Hence Coryate cannot be totally held responsible for the so called colonial wood-cut. Coryate who was in awe of the animal has depicted it as a symbol of wealth and power. Persons like Hawkins relate the emperor possessing forty thousand elephants. Coryate had seen that Jehangir had presented the Persian emperor with two elephants.

The wealth that Jehangir possessed was another aspect on which most travel writers dwelt. Besides the jewels, silver, gold and other civilized forms of wealth, Jehangir owned numerous elephants, horses, camels and other similar livestock the maintenance of which amounted to a huge sum of money.

The birthday celebrations is another event which Roe, Terry and Coryate all make a mention of. It was a tradition which had been started by Jahangir's father Akbar. The emperor was weighed in a golden scale against gold, silver and the sort. This wealth was later distributed among the poor.

Thus, we can see that Coryate observes various ceremonies which he very accurately describes in his accounts and letters home. However we cannot forget that Coryate would be lost without the support of the East India Company. Thus Coryate in spite of witnessing various ceremonies does not depict India in a manner that is exotic or strange.

## **PORTRAYAL OF THE EAST**

The image that the English constructed of the East was to reconfirm their own identity and position in the world where the English were acquiring new knowledge of the lands they imagined as exotic. The actual motive behind this quest rested in the expansion of local markets. The Portuguese and Dutch had already created a strong foothold in the eastern countries and as a result they were reaping benefits on a regular basis. The East was portrayed by earlier travellers as a wealthy region having immense commercial value. Previous studies have used travel writing and the other trade documents to examine and understand how the British images of India were formed in Britain and consequently led to the colonizing of the same. However, it is necessary to take a step further and try to apply these travel documents to understand the formation of the image of the Orient. When the British saw India or rather the east as a lucrative business opportunity, it was a counteraction for their inferiority complex at home which they tried to hide by referring to the east as barbarian and especially the Ottoman Empire which they posed through

plays and dramas as a threat to Christendom, a threat which needed to be checked and curbed.

The Dutch and Portuguese were successively coming out highly successful in their ventures in the East. As a result a great deal of material was being furnished in order to provide assistance for further expansion and trade. Around 1580 a large amount of first-hand information was being translated into English to induce the same kind of interest in the East among their merchants. The advances in marine technology and navigation gradually increased the prospects of returning home victorious from what had been until then a highly risky venture.

The English curiosity regarding India began rising around the beginning of the sixteenth century. The advances made by the printing industry combined with the efforts of persons like Richard Hakluyt further inflated the interest in having trade relations with the East.

However the knowledge available to them revolved mainly around the translations of earlier accounts. These accounts were written by persons from different countries with multiple motives. Some of these accounts were based on historical facts, some on trade while others were based purely on geography books.

An expanding demand for trading goods of the east like spices, silks, indigo, and cotton was the main motive behind this interest. On the other hand the English needed a market to unload their products. Earlier records and accounts did prove India to be a lucrative market where both of these English needs could be satisfied. Milton wrote,

High on a throne of royal state, which far  
Outshone the wealth of Ormuz or Ind,  
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand  
Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold  
Satan exalted sat...<sup>31)</sup>

This as R.C. Prasad points is probably taken from the account when Thomas Roe met Parviz at Burhanpur which was a highly dramatic interview. Roe describes this meeting "when high on a gallery, with a canopy over him and a carpet before him, sat in a great and barbarous state the Great Mughal."<sup>32)</sup> At this time the English not only showed a fervent interest in India, but there existed various travel accounts related to India.

Prasad reveals that it is a highly impossible task to accurately estimate the source of data relating to India being a rich and populous country abounding in spices, silks and cotton textiles. Also that Britain depended highly on trade for its sustenance is another factor which may have accelerated the process of information collection and translating texts from which the English could decipher their plan of action and itinerary regarding new voyages.



John Mandeville provided a range of medieval and classical sources which depicted the east as a highly wealthy region which was inhabited by multifarious races of people. *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* which appeared in 1356 or 57 was highly successful and "During the last quarter of the fourteenth century and virtually throughout the entire fifteenth century this work burgeoned into one of the most copied and translated texts."<sup>33)</sup>

From this one can infer that the *Travels* had a considerable influence on the minds of the people in reference to religions, customs, wonders, Muslims, Mohammed and other natural phenomena, as this account spoke on all these subjects rather extensively. Furthermore, the account of *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*

... mixed authentic perceptions with amazing inventions, monsters taken from classical sources, episodes from the life of Alexander and stories which were pure products of medieval fantasy. Its similarity to the reports of other medieval travellers was superficial; and in essence it was entertainment, cleverly combining the reality that the reader knew and expected, with elements of traditional medieval ideas about distant, exotic lands.<sup>34)</sup>

Though these early accounts which were rather popular, according to modern critics like Bovenschen, they were rather fictitious and that is self-evident from the fact that Mandeville is said to have "begun his journey on Saint Michael's day in the year 1322 and wrote his account from memory almost thirty-four years later, in 1356".<sup>35)</sup> It has also been stated that "he used Wilhelm von Boldensele's *Itenerarium* (1336) for describing his stay at Constantinople, the Holy Land and Egypt".<sup>36)</sup> On the other hand, some experts do believe that "Mandeville actually did undertake at least a part of the travels he describes, notably the sojourn in Egypt," since "Such extensive literary erudition could not have been readily available to a fourteenth century layman, and doubtless required either university study or the broad education accorded to members of the clergy". Hence, Mandeville's account cannot be merely dismissed as fiction or myth, as it has played a rather crucial role in framing the mindset of the people regarding the East.

The Bolognese Lodovico de Verthema<sup>37)</sup> who was an independent traveller, and had journeyed the southern parts of India stupefied it as being abundant in food, spices, cloth and valuables. His works were translated into English and included in Richard Eden's *History of Trauayle*. Verthema experienced India as an "earthly Paradyse" where he states that elephants had near-human understanding and the emperor who mastered the ingestion of poison in his body over a long period of time killed his traitors by merely spitting on them.<sup>38)</sup>

Thus, these images were extremely entertaining for the people at home who read these account with awe and experienced some kind of fascination in discussing such exotic themes. In

1589 Richard Hakluyt published the first edition of his *Principall Navigations* which contained letters from Englishmen who had either settled in India or were temporarily there for trade purposes. He also included accounts of merchants like Newberry and Ralph Fitch. At the time "English merchants were striving eagerly to discover some means of securing a share in the rich trade with the East, but so far their endeavours had been unsuccessful."<sup>39)</sup> The sea route around the Cape of Good Hope was not only a dangerous one but was under the control of the Portuguese. In this concern John Newberry had returned after making certain progress in the desired direction. Ralph Fitch and John Newberry had been initiated by the Levant Company to discover a new trade route to India.

Both these persons were given letters of introduction from Queen Elizabeth addressed to the Mogul Emperor Akbar and Emperor of China.<sup>40)</sup> They set sail from London in February of 1583. The two letters of introduction along with Fitch's narrative, letter and six letters from Newberry are printed in Hakluyt. In addition Purchas has added two letters from Newberry and one from Eldred to Hakluyt's version.

Particularly interesting was an account by Jan Huyghen van Linschoten compiled into the *Itenerario*, published in Hakluyt Society's edition about travellers' experiences in Goa. According to John Parker, Linschoten's book was an exhaustive manual which included thirteen maps and a number of engravings portraying Europeans and Indians. He stressed that the *Itenerario* provided the latest information available and moreover that it was available in English<sup>41)</sup>

Two years prior to the formation of the East India Company, translated accounts of two Dutch merchants appeared. The translation was published under the title *The Description of a Voyage made by Certaine Ships of Holland*. The information included here mainly revolved on cultural aspects of India and included some maps. This translation also included an advertisement for the book of Linschoten.

However, the translation of all these books was done very cautiously. It not only raised national pride among the large readership, but also subtly moderated the risk of journey and hardships involved so as to attract and encourage larger number of youth to join the mission. As a result merchants and traders were persuaded to undertake the risk involved in the venture because the lucrative profits accruing from these dangerous pursuits were also carefully calculated.

Another effect which these accounts accrued was the curiosity it induced among the readers through exotic images it portrayed. As can be seen in the accounts of Mandeville and Verthema, the descriptions of the east as a dramatic land filled with adventure, a paradise laden with marvels another major factor which played on the psyche of the readership. Thus, the weaving of trade and commercial interests with that of the marvels and exoticism broadened not only the

readership but also the avenues to mentally colonizing the east.

Hence this acquired knowledge of the east opened up newer markets for England. Grabbing this opportunity, voyages to the east were planned and launched. Ralph Fitch and Newberry who had undertaken a mission to explore a new route to India had ended in a disaster and hence new routes had to be examined and implemented.<sup>42)</sup>

With the chartering of the East India Company in 1600, England began to depend heavily on them for information about India. However, what must not be forgotten is that the accounts and letters did not change much from what had been communicated in the earlier centuries. Though the profits accrued were erratic, constant efforts were being made to curtail the perils involved with the expeditions. This was managed by the compilation and documentation of successfully completed voyages. All persons posted abroad on behalf of the Company were required to keep account of their expeditions which were to be submitted to the head quarters in London. In London all these accounts were recorded as reference material for further voyages.<sup>43)</sup>

India whether portrayed by the East India Company or by the earlier travellers was always a land of wealth and bountifulness. Coryate remarks that "no part of the world yeelding a more fruitful veine of ground, then all that which lieth in his [Jahangir's] Empire".<sup>44)</sup> Hence we notice that the depiction of the East as lush and rich, a land which had high yielding powers. This description over time played on the psyche of the broad readership at home. Thus, the visualization process was controlled in a manner such that, though the journey involved perils, the readers at home would mentally and financially supported the voyages to be undertaken.

Singh aptly explains that the English description of India begins with "the impulse to catalogue". It was through the management of details which the English accrued from the East India Company officials in India that a certain control began to be exercised over the situation. Gradually the idea of "us" and "they" installed in the English a confidence which eventually took shape into a superiority complex. This complex was rooted in the bifurcation of two cultures of England and India. With the help of the usage of binaries as Singh points, these ideas were categorized under the headings of civilized/barbarous, tradition/modernity, Christianity/heathendom.

What is Coryate's contribution to the transmission of this image of India?

Singh reveals by bundling together "Coryate, Roe, and other Englishmen represent their cultural encounters in India as both eye-witness accounts and as spectacles of discovery and amazement, and as such their views are hardly benign. They function as both actors and spectators in the early colonial scene of writing".<sup>45)</sup> Here I wish to raise the point that Coryate cannot be clubbed into the same group as Roe. Rather the two should be seen as distinct entities as their respective aims of visiting India differed totally. Roe an Ambassador to the Mogul court

was primarily interested in achieving trade grants for England. Coryate on the other hand, a figure of endless intellectual curiosity, made efforts to walk almost all the way by spending the least.

In the first place Coryate has very clearly been separated from the rest of the English travellers or members of the East India Company. In any introduction to Coryate, whether it is Michael Strachan or R. C. Prasad, one can notice that he has certain firsts attached to his name. Hence, I hope to point out here that this inclusion of Thomas Coryate with other Englishmen and Roe, by authors, is done for no other motive but convenience. Thus, it would be incorrect to include or exclude Coryate and his work on basis that suits the situation. It is true that of late a great deal of stress is laid on travel accounts to get a better understanding of the colonization process through literature.

Singh applies the concept of Mary Louise Pratt to Coryate, who, according to her is none other than the "seeing man" who under the guise of innocence "represents the act of discovery as a form of 'anti-conquest,' whereby the European bourgeois subject can secure his innocence in the same moment that he asserts, or, in this case, assumes European superiority."<sup>46)</sup> In this connection Singh explains in her notes that seventeenth-century travellers did not make any direct connection between seeing and possessing. However she re-asserts that their roles are similar to Mary Pratt's "seeing man" in spite of the fact that he makes his appearance on the colonial landscape later.

Here I wish to raise a vital question as to whether Coryate fits into this explanation. Another important aspect which Singh asserts is that the impulsive nature of the English to catalogue all the acquired knowledge "enabled the establishment of detailed typologies of geographical, cultural and moral categories, and in turn, became a crucial aspect of the project of colonial meaning-making from the earliest European encounters." These typologies according to her go on and "mark identity and difference, thus usefully determining what will be perceived as different".<sup>47)</sup>

### CONCLUSION:

Consequently it becomes necessary to reassert that Thomas Coryate who travelled entirely on his own expenses and for the passion of travelling cannot be included and studied under the colonial context. He, with his paradoxical images of a buffoon and erudite, traversed the unknown with an open and inquisitive mind. At times he has made certain exaggerations, though in no manner does he try to mar or demean the 'other'. It is true that he is a proud Englishman but he has maintained that stance even on his continental tour through Europe. It is not typical of his peregrination of the east where he suddenly dons the robe of superiority.

**NOTES:**

- 1) Foster 1968:235
- 2) Foster 1968:235
- 3) Coryate 1905:114(Vol.I)
- 4) Foster 1968: 253
- 5) Strachan 1962:159
- 6) Strachan 1962:163
- 7) Strachan 1962:165
- 8) Strachan 1962: 166
- 9) Strachan 1962:167
- 10) Strachan 1962:167
- 11) Strachan 1962:167
- 12) Strachan 1962:169
- 13) Strachan 1962:170
- 14) Strachan 1962:171
- 15) Strachan 1962:172
- 16) Strachan 1962:171
- 17) Strachan 1962:171-2
- 18) Strachan 1962:179
- 19) Strachan 1962:180
- 20) Strachan 1962:190
- 21) Strachan 1962:191
- 22) Strachan 1962:191
- 23) Strachan 1962:200
- 24) Strachan 1962:211
- 25) Strachan 1962:218
- 26) Strachan 1962:220
- 27) Singh 1996:1
- 28) Strachan 1962:235
- 29) Prasad 1965:183
- 30) Spenser 1596: IV, vii, 5-6
- 31) Milton 1674: II, 1-5
- 32) For a detailed version description of the meeting between Thomas Roe and Parviz, please refer *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India*, edited by William Foster. (Oxford, 1926) p. 70
- 33) Kussi 1983:8
- 34) Kussi 1983:8
- 35) Kussi 1983:8
- 36) Kussi 1983:8
- 37) Eden 1520:363; Rubies 2000:125-163
- 38) Eden 1520:384-385
- 39) Foster 1968:1; Prasad 1965: 24

- 40) Foster 1968: 2. ; Prasad, 1965: 24
- 41) Van Linschoten 1598; Parker 1965:133
- 42) Edwards 1972
- 43) Strachan 1971:13
- 44) Coryate 1616:22
- 45) Singh 1996:47
- 46) Singh 1996:47
- 47) Singh 1996:28

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